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TAGS: [KCRM](#) [KWMN](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [SMIG](#) [ELAB](#) [NU](#)  
SUBJECT: RESIGNATION OF NICARAGUAN OFFICIAL FROM ANTI-TIP  
COALITION, A TROUBLING SIGN

REF: A. MANAGUA 07 00796  
[1](#)B. MANAGUA 07 00882

Classified By: Ambassador Paul A Trivelli for reasons 1.4 (b and d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Maria Gabriela Zuniga, Program Director of the National Coalition Against Trafficking in Persons, tendered her resignation to the Ministry of Government last week, citing personal reasons for her decision. She confided to us that the working conditions and culture of secrecy under the Ortega government made it impossible for her to play any effective role within the Ministry of Government or in the Coalition. Instead, she intends to continue working on the trafficking in persons issue outside the government sphere, and could find a position with one of the major NGOs dedicated to the issue in Nicaragua. She was one of the top candidates selected to participate in the International Law Enforcement Academy's (ILEA) anti-TIP training course scheduled for San Salvador later this month. She recently completed an International Visitor's Program with the Department of State, and she has been a key contact for information regarding the government's anti-trafficking activities, and the main source of government information essential to completing the Department's annual trafficking in persons report. Her departure will be a loss to our efforts to monitor Nicaragua's anti-TIP activities and encourage a more effective government response to the problem. END SUMMARY.

Losing an Asset  
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[1](#)2. (C) Over the past two and a half years, post has developed a close working relationship with Maria Gabriela Zuniga, Program Director of the National Coalition against Trafficking in Persons. Although still at the beginning of her professional career, Zuniga has proven to be a leader in terms of generating government interest in the issue of trafficking in persons, developing a National Plan of Action, and working across agencies and civil society organizations to promote an integral approach to the problem. She has become a valuable asset to the Embassy in her area of expertise, and has been cooperative and forthcoming in providing information to political officers during both the human rights report and trafficking in persons annual reporting exercises (Reftel A). She was selected to participate in an International Visitors Program in February.

[1](#)3. (C) Although there were rumors soon after Ortega took

office that Zuniga would be swept up as part of the new administration's attempt to clean house, we were relieved when the Ministry of Government selected Zuniga as one of its leading candidates to participate in the ILEA-sponsored "Trafficking in Persons Course for Law Enforcement Professionals" in San Salvador April 23 to May 4 (Reftel B). We felt encouraged that this meant the Ortega government was serious about continuing the commitment to addressing the TIP problem. Zuniga's decision to step down from her government position means she is ineligible to participate in this conference, and that a less experienced alternate from her organization will go in her place.

Resignation was Personal Choice, but...

14. (C) When we received the news that Zuniga had decided to leave her position within the Ministry of Government after serving for almost three years, and making a name for herself in the trafficking in persons field, we became concerned that she had been forced to resign. In contrast to the spate of dismissals of government officials--from both politically appointed and civil service ranks--Zuniga maintains her decision was voluntary. During a candid meeting we held with her last week, she explained that for her own "sanity" she had to leave the position because she was at a point where she could no longer perform her job given the silence and secrecy permeating the Ministry of Government under the leadership of the Ortega government. Zuniga described a dysfunctional and paralyzing working environment that left people demoralized and made it "impossible" to coordinate actions or make decisions at an internal level.

15. (C) Zuniga contends that under this administration, the Ministers are not given any decisionmaking power, and are mere "puppets," whose strings are pulled directly by President Ortega or First Lady Rosario Murillo, the administration's Director of Communications and Citizenry. She explained that despite her repeated efforts to meet with her supervisor, the Vice Minister of Government, she failed and was virtually ostracized. Given these conditions, Zuniga felt she had no other choice but to resign.

Departure Augurs Poorly for Government's Anti-TIP Plans

16. (C) Zuniga also harbors doubts about the Ortega government's commitment and political will to continue to address the issue of trafficking, asserting that it doesn't much matter if someone at her level is committed, if the top leadership level is not. Zuniga is also convinced that only constant outside pressure from civil society and organizations like the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and Casa Alianza will keep the government focused on combating trafficking in persons. She clarified, however, that TIP is not the sole responsibility of the Ministry of Government, but rather entails a broader commitment from other government agencies. She suggested that other government agencies had failed to shoulder their share of responsibility.

17. (C) Zuniga explained that her experience is not unique, confiding that colleagues in other agencies and ministries, including Foreign Affairs, Family, and Immigration, were also leaving of their own accord or being forced out, including some Sandinistas. Echoing reports we have heard from other disenchanted and sidelined officials, the Ortega-Murillo cabal does not trust anyone who is not part of its inner circle. For example, the director of information for Immigration was fired, likely because the new administration doubted his loyalty. She mentioned that the person who will probably replace her on the Coalition comes with no prior TIP experience.

Looking Ahead to NGOs

18. (C) On a more positive note, Zuniga looks forward to

continuing to work the issue outside the government sector, possibly with the IOM. She and IOM National Director Raul Rivas have been collaborating on a National Anti-TIP Action Plan, which she believes is an effective project that could produce tangible results and bring Nicaragua into full compliance with international anti-trafficking standards. She reiterated, however, that any action by the government will depend on continued external and international pressure.

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